**ACTS & US**

**Acts 24**

**“Who is Jesus, What is a Messiah”**

Previously on Acts and Us…

From the moment Paul arrived in Jerusalem it’s been chaos. Crowds rioting against him, Romans shackling him and about to flog him, high priests having him punched in the mouth, put in the Roman barracks to protect him from being “pulled apart” by the mob, and 40 assassins on a pledged hunger strike until they kill him.

It would have been easy for him to succumb to fear thinking that there is no way he could get out of this situation alive…

Except for the promise of the Lord’s word to him…

**Acts 23:11** “But the following night the Lord stood by him and said, “Be of good cheer, Paul; for as you have testified for Me in Jerusalem, so you must also bear witness at Rome.”

Paul held on to that promise even though things did not seem to be going the way he would have hoped. He does get a little closer to Rome when he is sent under the protection of a huge military detail to Caesarea. He was awaiting trial by his accusers from Jerusalem who came soon after, but found himself stuck there for two years by Governor Felix who talked with him frequently during this time.

It is in these conversations that we get a glimpse of Paul’s basis of faith and the basic beliefs of “The Way” (the name given to the Jewish sect of believers also known as Nazarenes). We see clearly that the Christianity of the early church looked much more like Messianic Judaism, than modern Protestantism, and Paul and the other leaders considered themselves Jewish, and their movement was a fulfilment of their Hebrew faith, not a departure from it.

**ACTS 24**

**24:1-4**Five days later the high priest *Ananias* went down to Caesarea with some of the elders and a lawyer named Tertullus, and they brought their charges against Paul before the governor. **2**When Paul was called in, Tertullus presented his case before Felix: “We have enjoyed a long period of peace under you, and your foresight has brought about reforms in this nation. **3**Everywhere and in every way, most excellent Felix, we acknowledge this with profound gratitude. **4**But in order not to weary you further, I would request that you be kind enough to hear us briefly.

This is the same Ananias from the previous chapter who had Paul struck on the mouth in Jerusalem. (The high priest who ordered him to be struck was *Ananias Ben Nedebeus* who was high priest at the end of the Second Temple period.) He came with some of the Jewish elders and a lawyer from among them. The first thing he does is flatter the Roman governor, before bringing charges against Paul.

**5**“We have found this man to be a troublemaker, stirring up riots among the Jews all over the world. He is a ringleader of the Nazarene sect **6**and even tried to desecrate the temple; so we seized him.

This is a very important verse because it shows us what the identity and reputation of the early church was to outsiders. The High Priest from Jerusalem is describing to a Roman Governor in Caesarea who Paul is. SO his basic description is that he is a leader in a sect of Judaism known as the Nazarenes.

There were many sects of Judaism in that time; Pharisees/Sadducees, Herodians, Gnostics, Hellenists, Essenes, and now Nazarenes.

Pharisees – Jewish teachers who believe in angels, spirits and the afterlife.

Sadducees – Jews who don’t.

Herodians – Jews who were loyal to the Herods, we see them as part of those who publicly challenged Jesus in Matt 22 by asking if it’s lawful to pay taxes to Caesar.

Gnostics – Jews who focus primarily on knowledge over faith.

Hellenists – Modern Greek influenced Jews.

Essenes – Jews who were so devout in their strict observance of the law, that they felt the Jews of Jerusalem were too corrupt for them, so they moved out to the Judean desert by the Dead Sea and practiced strict asceticism. They also revered the Holy scriptures so much that they carefully scribed the entire Old Testament and hid it in scrolls in the caves of Qumran (The Dead Sea Scrolls).

Nazarenes – Those who followed “The Way” which was a type of Judaism that believed that Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah and that he was not dead. This movement also allowed non-Jews (Gentiles) to become followers as well, and eventually became known as Christians.

That’s us! : )

**reread 5**“We have found this man to be a troublemaker, stirring up riots among the Jews all over the world. He is a ringleader of the Nazarene sect **6**and even tried to desecrate the temple; so we seized him... **[7]**[a]

Some later manuscripts include *another verse* (verse 7) here, although the earlier manuscripts do not;

 Acts 24:7 “…*him, and we would have judged him in accordance with our law.****7****But the commander Lysias came and took him from us with much violence,****8****ordering his accusers to come before you.”*

In this verse, they are basically telling the Governor that he would have not even been troubled by this issue if Claudius Lysias, the Roman commander stationed in Rome, who bought his Roman citizenship, hadn’t interfered.

**8**By examining him yourself you will be able to learn the truth about all these charges we are bringing against him.”

**9**The other Jews joined in the accusation, asserting that these things were true.

**10**When the governor motioned for him to speak, Paul replied: “I know that for a number of years you have been a judge over this nation; so I gladly make my defense.

Felix gave Paul the floor and he opportunity to explain himself. In doing so, he also explained to the governor AND the Jews what it means to be a follower of Jesus. He points out that everything he believes is in accordance with the Law and what is written in the Prophets.

**11**You can easily verify that no more than twelve days ago I went up to Jerusalem to worship. **12**My accusers did not find me arguing with anyone at the temple, or stirring up a crowd in the synagogues or anywhere else in the city. **13**And they cannot prove to you the charges they are now making against me. **14**However, I admit that I worship the God of our ancestors as a follower of the Way, which they call a sect. *I believe everything that is in accordance with the Law and that is written in the Prophets,****15****and I have the same hope in God as these men themselves have*, that there will be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked. **16**So I strive always to keep my conscience clear before God and man.

**17**“After an absence of several years, I came to Jerusalem to bring my people gifts for the poor and to present offerings. **18**I was ceremonially clean when they found me in the temple courts doing this. There was no crowd with me, nor was I involved in any disturbance. **19**But there are some Jews from the province of Asia, who ought to be here before you and bring charges if they have anything against me. **20**Or these who are here should state what crime they found in me when I stood before the Sanhedrin— **21**unless it was this one thing I shouted as I stood in their presence: ‘It is concerning the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial before you today.’”

Paul brought the issue of the *resurrection of the dead* (or the *afterlife*) up again just as he did in Jerusalem. Most scholars believe that Ananias was a Sadducee, who therefore did not believe in such things. Paul knew that if he exposed the fact that the charges brought against him were merely trivial matters of Jewish doctrine and not threats to Roman order, his case would likely be dismissed. This is basically what happened, only Felix decided to send for Lysias, the Roman Commander to testify in this case.

**22**Then Felix, who was well acquainted with the Way, adjourned the proceedings. “When Lysias the commander comes,” he said, “I will decide your case.” **23**He ordered the centurion to keep Paul under guard but to give him some freedom and permit his friends to take care of his needs.

**24**Several days later Felix came with his wife Drusilla, who was Jewish. He sent for Paul and listened to him as he spoke about *faith in Christ Jesus*. **25**As Paul talked about righteousness, self-control and the judgment to come,

Luke mentions that Paul “he spoke about *faith in Christ Jesus*” along with *three topics* to Drusilla and Felix. Theyare topics that he also presents in his epistles. Through these teachings he shares the gospel to both the Roman Governor and his Jewish wife;

* Righteousness – Rom. 3:21-22 “But now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness is given *through faith in Jesus Christ* to all who believe. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile,”
* Self-Control – Gal 5:23 “…gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.”
* Judgement to come - Romans 14:10 **“**You, then, why do you judge your brother or sister? Or why do you treat them with contempt? For we will all stand before God’s judgment seat.”

**25b** “Felix was afraid and said, “That’s enough for now! You may leave. When I find it convenient, I will send for you.” **26**At the same time he was hoping that Paul would offer him a bribe, so he sent for him frequently and talked with him.

**27**When two years had passed, Felix was succeeded by Porcius Festus, but because Felix wanted to grant a favor to the Jews, he left Paul in prison.” <>

When he was standing before this powerful official, with the opportunity to offer the most important words he could muster, either for his own benefit or the sake of the gospel…

“…he spoke about *faith in Christ Jesus”!*

**ACTS & US**

If/When we are given the opportunity to speak to someone very influential, or share our faith in a situation that is very strategic or important, what do we share?

What message or topic would you present first? What would you talk about?

*Light-hearted banter?, popular entertainment?, Social Issues?, economic concerns?*

Paul would argue that the first and most important thing you should talk about is…

 “Faith in Christ Jesus”?

What does it *mean* to have “Faith in Christ Jesus”?

In our times this is a very common phrase, but there are probably very few that actually know what it means.

The first part is Faith:

Faith is Trust (pistis)

But in this context, it’s not just a simple trust, it’s a complete trust in God.

It is putting your trust completely in His hands, embracing the reality of His presence, believing His Word, and submitting to His will.

The second part is Christ Jesus:

Christ means *Messiah*, and Jesus in this context, means the *son of God*.

Our message is; “Put your faith in Jesus, the Messiah, the Son of the living God.

When Peter received the download from God in Caesarea Philippi in Matthew 16, Jesus asked if any of the apostle knew who he really was. No one gave the correct answer until Peter responded with his famous quote;

Matt 16:15-16 **15**“But what about you?” Jesus asked. “Who do you say I am?”

**16**Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.”

We must believe that Jesus is the Christ (Messiah).

Belief in *Jesus as Messiah* is very important. In fact it’s the most important thing that anyone can ever believe in. It’s what it means to be a “believer”.

Since it’s so important, it would make sense to know what “Messiah” means.

MESSIAH:

*Messiah* comes from the Hebrew word *mashiach* and means “The Anointed one” or “chosen one.” The Greek equivalent is the word *Christos* or, in English, *Christ*. That’s why the name “Jesus Christ” is the same as “Jesus the Messiah.”

Jesus of Nazareth *was* and *is* the prophesied Messiah. Throughout the New Testament, we see proof that Jesus is the *Chosen Anointed One* through the prophecies He fulfilled and the miracles He performed.

In fact in John tells us that he wrote his gospel for one specific reason:

**John 20:31“**But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.”

The Jews of Jesus’ day, including the Pharisees, Sadducees, High Priests and everyone else, expected the Messiah to redeem Israel by overthrowing the rule of the Romans and establishing an earthly kingdom. Even the apostles expected that.

It wasn’t until after Jesus’ resurrection that His disciples finally began to understand what the prophecies in the Old Testament really meant the Messiah would do. The Messiah was “anointed” first to deliver His people *spiritually*; that is, to redeem them from sin. He accomplished this salvation through His death and resurrection. Later, Jesus the Messiah will deliver His people from their physical enemies when He sets up His Kingdom on the earth.

The larger story is that God created mankind to be in a deep level of relationship with Him. It was perfect until sin entered the world and ruined it.

The only way it could be restored and corrected, was by *the Messiah*. The perfect son of God who gave His life on the cross for the sins of the world and rose from the dead to defeat death. Jesus did that.

Now it’s possible to be restored into deep relationship with God and have eternal life with Him in heaven.

All he asks, is that you *believe…*

Believe what?

*“that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God,*

*and that by believing you may have life in his name.” (John 20:31)*

That means both *abundant life* here on earth, and *eternal life* in heaven forever.

If you struggle with believing that. Don’t condemn yourself. You can change that.

If you don’t believe, ask God to *help your unbelief.*

Many people, even seasoned Christians get stuck in “*Doubting Castle”.*

*(From the 17th century classic allegory; Pilgrim’s Progress by John Bunyan.)*

In this story the weary Pilgrims start to give in to fears and unbelief and find themselves in the dungeon of Doubting Castle.

Many of us feel locked away by doubt from time to time.

How do we get out?

Let go of whatever else you are trusting and clinging to…

And put your FAITH/TRUST in Jesus.

Not in your own intellect,

Not in past experiences,

Not in what you’ve learned or been told,

Not in your traditions or doubts.

Trust in Jesus the Messiah, the Son of the living God.

Believe in His power, His wisdom and believe that He loves you…

Put your complete trust and faith in Him,

Not just so that you can be saved from your sins, and have assurance of heaven,

But so that you can live a full and abundant life in his name!